

THE *in N. Hall*
Armsby
CIRCULAR LETTER
England — Church — *Baptists —*
FROM THE *Northamptonshire Ass.*
BAPTIST MINISTERS, and MESSENGERS,

Assembled at KETTERING, *May* 27, 28, and 29, 1788.

Maintaining inviolably the important Doctrines of three equal Persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal Election; original Sin; particular Redemption; free Justification by the imputed Righteousness of Christ; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the final Perseverance of the Saints; the Resurrection of the Dead; the future Judgment; and the Life everlasting; with the congregational Order of the Churches of Christ.

To the several Churches they represent, or have received Letters from, meeting at Codnor, in *Derbyshire*; Sutton-Ashfield and Nottingham, in *Nottinghamshire*; Sheephead, Leicester, Sutton-in-the-Elms, and Armsby, in *Leicestershire*; Oakham, in *Rutland*; Clipstone, Guilsborough, Gretton, Kettering, Walgrave, Moulton, Northampton, and Road, in *Northamptonshire*; Olney, in *Buckinghamshire*; Carlton and Thorn, in *Bedfordshire*; St. Alban's, in *Hertfordshire*; Spalding, in *Lincolnshire*; and Soham, in *Cambridgeshire*.

Grace be unto you, and Peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear brethren,

THROUGH the goodness of the Lord we met together at the time and place appointed, and would bless his name for the direction and assistance that was afforded us. We enjoyed, on the whole, a pleasing satisfaction in reading your letters. It is true there are two or three churches in the association whose circumstances are rather discouraging, and for these we hope it will be your and our concern to pray, that the good Shepherd of Israel would heal them, and increase them with men like a flock. But blessed be God, the churches in general appear to be in a thriving condition. No less than *eight* in this associate connection, which were lately destitute, have within these twelvemonths, been provided with pastors. We have seen and heard of these settlements with pleasure, and now we have the additional satisfaction to find that they have all been followed by an increase in the respective churches, and some of them very considerable.

We are glad to find by your letters, that the great doctrines of the gospel, which we agree in prefixing to our annual epistles, are what you continue to believe and live upon. We are firmly persuaded of several of them, that they are essential to the *being* of real christianity; and of *all* that the belief of them is necessary to our *well-being* in the christian course. We hope, for our parts, it is our desire to know nothing among you but CHRIST, and *him crucified*. The doctrines which relate to the dignity of his person, as God over all, *blessed for ever*, with the necessity, reality, and efficacy of his atonement, seem to us especially to constitute the

the very essence of christianity. Take these away, and all that hangs upon them, and there is nothing left for which it is worth contending.

Our present annual epistle will be taken up in reminding you of a few of these capital truths, and confirming your faith in them. Permit us, dear brethren, to recommend to your serious attention the following observations.

First. *Man was originally created holy and happy.*—It is written, *God made man upright—after his own image—in the image of God created he him.* His understanding was light, his will rectitude, his passions burned with one pure and unremitting flame of devotedness to God. Such a soul must needs be happy; a soul so near to God, so like him, must enjoy bliss uninterrupted and unspeakable. We wish you, brethren, never to entertain depreciating thoughts of man in his primitive state; for this cannot be done but at the expence of his creator's character.—The perfection of man's primitive state, however, did not include *immutability*. Immutability is essential only to God. Jehovah claims it as peculiar to himself. *I am Jehovah, I change not.* He only is the *Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* Though God made man to resemble himself, yet not in his *natural* perfections, as an omnipotent, omniscient, independant and immutable being; but as a rational, voluntary, conscious agent, possessing the *moral* qualities of righteousness and true holiness. Thus far man was made in the image of God; but in other respects there is nothing in the whole creation which is any fit resemblance of Him, nothing to which He may be compared. Isa. xl. 18--25. xlv. 5--9. Ps. lxxxix. 6. Exod. viii. 10. Deut. xxxiii. 26. Jer. x. 6, 7. What God alone is, creatures are not—creatures of the highest order are mutable; it was not therefore surprizing that they should become what they originally were not, as the case now is with both angels and men.

Secondly. *Men are now born to misery and death.* Universal experience confirms what the scriptures assert, that *man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*—that he is of *few days and full of trouble.* (Job v. 7. xiv. 1.)—that the sentence of *death is passed upon all men,* and is daily executing upon people of all nations, ages, and conditions.

Thirdly. *Misery and death are the fruits of sin.* To suppose natural evil inflicted without the consideration of moral evil committed, is to deny either the *reality* or *equity* of the divine government. Yet it is evident from scripture and observation, that diseases and death extend to those who (not being voluntary agents) are not the subjects of personal guilt. It cannot be said that infants have *sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression*; nevertheless death reigned from Adam—over such. Rom. v. 14. Every thing tending to prove the *personal* blamelessness of infants, must tend to establish the idea of *relative* guilt: for either in a personal or relative sense, the charge of sin must be extended as far as death, its consequent, is inflicted. Hence the apostle says, *By one man sin entered into the world, and DEATH BY SIN, AND SO DEATH PASSED UPON ALL MEN, FOR THAT ALL HAVE SINNED.* Rom. v. 12.*

It

* Some seem to suppose that the threatening denounced against Adam in case of his disobedience, was the immediate *loss of existence*; and the Reason of his not being directly annihilated, was the interposition of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.—If the Design of this strange hypothesis is to get rid of the sin of Adam as a public head and its imputation

It is a mournful fact, that all men, without exception, are impure, being conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity. Ps. li. 5. *For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. How can man be justified with God; or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?* Job xiv. 4. xxv. 4. From the last quoted passage it should seem that our native impurity is a bar to our being justified by the lawgiver of the world; but if guilt did not accompany pollution, that pollution could be no bar to justification; for surely the guiltless ought to be acquitted. *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity.—Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Job xxxiv. 10, 12.

The whole world are become guilty before God; and are in his hand as clay in the hand of a potter. *And hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* Rom. ix. 21. He was under no obligation to shew mercy to any; therefore he saith, *I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion.* He is a debtor to none; his grace is sovereign and free. Surely it is unbecoming and arrogant for creatures to arraign the Almighty at their bar, and dispute the propriety of his proceedings. We wish you, brethren, to compare the present general *objections* made to the doctrines of human depravity and divine sovereignty, with those which were made by the adversaries of truth in the apostolic age. You will by such a comparative view be confirmed in the doctrines of grace, by observing that your opponents draw the same inferences from *your* sentiments, which were then inferred from those of the apostle Paul. They then, as now, urged and argued, that if things were so as he asserted, men are not the subjects of blame. It is, say they, as God would have it—*why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?* Which questions the objector seems to have gloried in as unanswerable. May you, brethren, enter into the spirit and pertinency of the apostle's reply; *Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?* &c. See Rom. ix. 19, to the end.

Fourthly. *The introduction of moral evil was not unforeseen of God; neither did it take place without his permission.*—God was neither dis-

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appointed

tation to his descendants, it must be allowed very well to answer its end: for it must follow, according to this, that none of the human race were in the least affected by Adam's transgression. And thus, according to the original constitution of things, he must have been neither a *natural*, nor a *covenant* head to any one: not a *natural* head, because in case of disobedience he was to have had no descendants—not a *covenant* head, because non-existences could not possibly be affected by his misconduct. According to this representation, it was therefore impossible, unless the divine Being should deviate from his own covenant, that any man besides Adam himself, should feel in any sense, or in any degree whatever, the bad effects of his revolt from God. Thus the doctrine of original sin is consequentially annihilated by modern Arminians.

But the above hypothesis will not readily be received by unprejudiced minds, who reverence the sacred writings, and are not slaves to a system. If this sentiment be true, it must follow, that it was *not Adam's fall*, but Adam's *recovery* that ruined the world. The existence of all Adam's offspring, and consequently the introduction of sin amongst mankind, was, according to this sentiment, entirely owing to the grace of God; and human miseries originate in divine mercy, and are its native productions. So opposite is such a sentiment to divine revelation, that scripture language, and its obvious meaning, must be inverted, ere it can receive any countenance from thence. The account given by the inspired apostle, for instance, must be altered, and read thus, 'It was *not* by one man's offence that death reigned; *nor* by the offence of one that judgment came upon all men to condemnation; *nor* by one man's disobedience that many were made sinners.—No, all these are the effects of general grace, and Arminian mercy. So that respecting sorrow and sin, so much at least as is derived to us, every child of Adam may truly say, *By the grace of God I am what I am.*'

appointed nor disconcerted, by the breaking out of rebellion in his empire. He knew that we should revolt and deal treacherously, and laid down his plan accordingly. He did not impell or incline man to sin on the one hand, nor did he interpose absolutely to prevent him from sinning on the other; but left him to his own free choice, according to the nature of the covenant under which he was placed. God's permitting man to sin was not an *allowance* or *permission in law*—so far from *that* he employed all his authority in prohibiting sin; but did not see proper to exert therewith all his ability to withhold him from committing it.

Fifthly. *Sin is of a nature offensive to God, being contrary to his holiness, and in opposition to his righteous authority.*—If sin were not displeasing to God, no law would have been necessary to regulate the conduct of rational creatures. But the giving of a law armed with the threatening of death to the disobedient, as its awful sanction, proves that moral evil is what his soul abhors.

Sixthly. *If God be displeased with sin he must discover that displeasure.* God could *not* be morally good, if he did not *hate* sin; nor could he *appear* to be so, if he *concealed* his displeasure. For if he be offended and no way discover that he is so, the glory of his holiness would never appear to the intellectual universe; while his non-accomplished threatenings would impeach his veracity, and eternally stain his character and reputation. Were that the case there would be no need of the question, *Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God?* for such a governor and government would be unavoidably and universally despised.

Seventhly. *If God shew his displeasure against sin, it must be in a way that affects the felicity of the criminal.* If his displeasure did not impair the happiness of creatures, it would be to them a matter of indifference what they were, or how they acted, whether they obeyed or disobeyed, loved or abhorred their creator. But the language of reason and revelation is, *Wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him.* And it is equally evident that the awful effects of God's anger must bear some *proportion* to the nature and degree of the displeasure discovered. If he were but a little averse to sin, the consequences might not be very dreadful; but his aversion to it is unlimited, therefore the dreadful effects of sin must in some respects be unlimited too, surpassing all creature-conception. The actions of creatures are indeed all limited, their sins therefore are not *equal*, either in number or heinousness; hence greater degrees of punishment will be inflicted on some than on others. Matt. x. 15. But the malignity of sin as sin, being estimated from the infinite goodness and glory of God against whom it is committed, the punishment, however different in degree, will be equal in duration; all, as it were stamped with eternity. How tremendous the thought!

Eighthly. *If God is disposed to pardon sin, it must be done in such a way as to discover his utter disapprobation of it.* If he necessarily hate sin, he cannot sovereignly abrogate his moral prohibitions in favour of delinquents, nor recede from inflicting the threatened penalty. Mercy must not be exercised at the expence of purity and veracity. Better that the whole race of revolted men should perish along with fallen angels, with whom they sided against God, than that the glory of his government should be tarnished with dishonour.

Ninthly. *Punishment and pardon cannot take place in the same subject.*—If the sinner is punished, he is not pardoned; or if pardoned, he cannot be legally punished. And yet if God cannot conceal his holy displeasure,
punishment

punishment must be inflicted somewhere. If upon the sinner, mercy must of course be excluded. What then must be done? Finite wisdom never could have devised how the happiness of sinners could consist with the equity, or comport with the holiness of God. But what was impossible for creatures to discover, God has graciously brought to light through the gospel of his dear Son. He has *devised means that his banished should not be expelled from him*. In the plan of salvation, through the mediation of Christ, made known for the obedience of faith, infinite purity and sovereign mercy, inflexible justice and abounding grace, consummate wisdom and almighty power, gloriously unite; and shine forth with unspeakable splendor.

Tenthly. *He that has undertaken the work of our redemption is GOD OVER ALL, blessed for evermore.*—The proper deity of our redeemer, brethren, is the glory of our religion; without it christianity is next to annihilated. That many objections should be made to this doctrine is not to be wondered at: so long as Christ has enemies in the world, so long we may expect the great doctrines of his gospel will meet with opposition; and the more important they are, the greater the opposition may be expected to be.—The main objection to this doctrine is its being *mysterious*; but this ought to be considered as a commendation rather than an objection. It is the glory of the gospel, that it contains truths which surpass the grasp of the most exalted understanding fully to comprehend. Herein they fitly correspond with the desires of an immortal soul. The soul of man is so constituted, that nothing satisfies it like the meditation of a boundless object. It loves to swim in an unfathomable ocean; if it can touch the bottom it feels disgust. Upon this principle too we see a glorious fitness in the name of Christ being called *wonderful*. Wonderful indeed, for the *child born to be the mighty God!* Well did the apostle exclaim, *Great is the MYSTERY of Godliness, GOD manifest in the FLESH!* But you will not expect an ample defence of this great truth in the small compass of a letter.* We shall here only take notice of two more *objections* which have entangled some pious minds—It is intimated in the scripture, that our Lord, during his state of humiliation, parted with a glory which he had before that period, and prayed to be invested with it again upon his finishing the work which was assigned him—that he being *rich*, for our sakes became *poor*, &c. This has been generally thought to imply his proper deity, the glory of which he possessed prior to his incarnation. But it is objected, that deity is *unchangeable*, and cannot be *impoverished*, and consequently these intimations cannot consist with his being a divine Person. But we *answer*, It is necessary for such Objectors to ascertain to *what* glory and riches these passages refer. Do they mean his *native internal excellence*; or that glory and honour which was *due to him* from others, as he was the subject of this excellence? If it could be proved that the former was intended, we grant it would answer the objector's end; for this would imply a changeability in his nature. But of what internal excellence was Christ ever divested? Even the native excellencies of his *human* nature were not diminished by his humiliation.—Reason, consciousness and reflection; holiness, meekness and love, each dwelt in him in the highest perfection.

And

* To those who wish to see the subject fully handled, we would recommend Dr. Bellamy's sermon on the *divinity of Christ*, prefixed to his sermons on the permission of sin—re-printed by Dicey, 1783 and 1787, and sold by Evans, London. And Dr. Abbadie's masterly treatise on the same important subject, abridged by the Rev. *Ab. Booz*, entitled, *The Deity of Jesus Christ essential to the Christian Religion*.

And if the internal glory, both natural and moral, of his human nature, was not sullied by his humiliating circumstances, much less could they lessen that of his divine nature, which was in union with his spotless humanity.—But if glory and riches be understood in the *second* sense, v. z. of the *glory* that was *due to him*, as the subject of native excellence (which undoubtedly it ought) then the objection vanishes. In that respect we allow he underwent an amazing change. The glory of his divinity lay as it were concealed, and that love, reverence and honour, which was his due, was with-held from him. *He made himself of no reputation*—became a subject of derision—the *song of the drunkard*—was accounted and called a madman, a sinner, and even a devil.—But all this change implies no changeability in his nature, no alteration as to his natural and moral excellencies; and when the veil which concealed his divinity was rent, his infinite glory appeared, and now as a divine person in our nature, all the rich revenue of praise returns to him as his native due.

The *other* objection is, that deity cannot die; but the person of Christ was the subject of death, therefore Christ was not God. We reply: death is a separation between soul and body; but it does not imply that either ceases to exist. It implies indeed a cessation of animation in the body; and thus the body of Christ was reduced to a lifeless corpse: but did his *soul* die? The objection has no force but upon the supposition that it did. If Christ might be truly said to die, notwithstanding one constituent part of his human nature still lived, why may not the same be affirmed of him though his divine nature remained immortal?

Lastly. We would remind you, that *from the divine dignity of Christ arises the merit and efficacy of his sufferings*. The efficacy of what he did and endured bears a proportion to his infinite worth. This idea we shall attend to in the subsequent part of this letter. Deity and humanity uniting in him, he became a fit person to act on man's behalf, as a substitute, surety, and saviour. We say *fit*, because he, and he only, could properly merit by obedience and death. The obedience of the most exalted creatures is naturally due to their creator. There is therefore nothing in their most perfect compliance with his will that deserves a reward. They are utterly incapable of *merit* in any higher sense than what is called merit of *congruity*; or they can never lay claim to any reward but in consequence of a previous condescending agreement. Hence a paction or covenant with them is ever pre-supposed, when we speak of their meriting even by perfect obedience. This is absolutely necessary, not in order that they should be bound to *obey* (to *that* they are under a natural and necessary obligation) but in order to their having any claim or title to the *reward*, which is only due by a gracious promise sovereignly made in their favour. But the Son of God was under no natural obligation to act as a servant, as creatures are. His appearing in such a form was entirely optional, the effect of his own choice. He *who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, took upon himself the form of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient unto death*. Being voluntarily made, that which he naturally was not. His obedience was the effect of his own spontaneous condescension, in assuming our nature for that end. On account of his native original dignity, a paction or agreement was necessary, in order to his *obeying*, but *not* to render his obedience *meritorious*. Such is the native littleness of creatures, and their natural obligation to obedience, as the dependant subjects of God's universal government, that
merit

merit cannot take place in them, but only in consequence the sovereign condescension of the lawgiver, engaging to reward the obedience to which he had a previous claim. But the obedience of the Son of God being the result of his own voluntary engagements, has an intrinsic merit founded upon his natural greatness and prior dignity as lord of all, and upon the *essential equity* of the moral governor of the world. His merit is therefore of an higher kind than that of Adam or of angels could ever have been. We conceive it is properly a *merit of condignity*, which in its *own nature* (and not barely upon the ground of a previous promise) *deserves* a reward. Hence he is said to *purchase* his people, and they are said to be *bought* by him, and what he did and endured is emphatically called a *price*. By the price of his precious blood (*God's own blood*, Acts xx) redemption was obtained, and the release of the captives secured for whom he *gave himself a ransom*.

It was owing to his dignity, that the law under which he came is magnified and made honourable, in its precepts and penalties, by his obedience unto death. God in human nature has given an awful and solemn proof of his impartiality and infinite regard to equity, in doing as a subject, what he requires as a sovereign. He has shewn to the universe that he has done as he would be done by.

We wish, dear brethren, that while you contemplate the wonderful *constitution* of your redeemer's person, as God and man, you may feel your hearts glow with holy gratitude for the *substitution* of one so wonderfully great and gracious, to act in your stead, as made under the law in your behalf, and standing in your place at the tremendous bar of justice. These are the pillars (so to speak) which support the important doctrine of *imputation*,* without the idea of which we know not how to reconcile the treatment of Christ and of his people by the supreme lawgiver, with the rules of equity and good government, by which protection is insured to the innocent, and punishment prepared for the guilty. Your divine Saviour had power over his own life, which no mere creature has. It was not violently taken from him without his consent, but voluntarily laid down for his sheep. He agreed to be made an offering for sin. To fall by the hands of punitive justice, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God. And that the whole transaction might appear strictly judicial, and every way right and equitable, sin was imputed to him, and charged or reckoned to his account. With his full consent, Jehovah laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and he bore it in his own body on the tree. Hence the world, which God went about to reconcile to himself by his Son, had not their trespasses imputed to them, but on the contrary

* Imputation makes no alteration in the personal character of the parties concerned. Christ was not thereby tainted with sin; He was not morally worse through sin's being placed to his account. He personally was the invariable object of the Father's delight, and never more lovely in his eye, than when groaning in the garden, or bleeding as a victim on the cross. But through imputation, he was in his people's stead, treated in a manner infinitely different from the desert of his personal character. In like manner the imputation of Christ's righteousness does not constitute personal holiness: sinners to whom it is imputed, are in a *safer state*, but not *thereby* made better men. Though justified in Christ, they are ungodly as in themselves. Thus divine grace shines with infinite lustre in treating sinners inconceivably better than corresponds with their real personal character: while *imputation* of righteousness does not supercede or render unnecessary the *implantation* of holiness in the hearts of men. The effects of grace in a man are the only evidences of righteousness being imputed to him. But inherent grace is no part of that righteousness of which it is an evidence. Through righteousness special blessings are procured, and through holiness they are enjoyed. Even as David describeth the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works,

contrary *He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.* 2 Cor. v. 18--21. This procedure was pointed out under the former figurative dispensation, which was to Israel a shadow of good things to come. Salvation from outward calamities, threatened by God as their civil governor, in case of disobedience, could only be obtained by sacrifice; the crimes of the offender being first ceremonially transferred to the intended victim, by the imposition of the hands of the priest. Lev. viii. 14. Especially we are told of the *scape goat*, that the priest was to *lay both his hands upon his head, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins*; thus *putting them upon the head of the goat*. And though this goat was not to be slain, but sent away alive into the wilderness, (Lev. xvi. 21.) it is to be considered as united in the same type with its fellow which was sacrificed, (xvi. 9, 15.) only as without a miracle a single goat could not prefigure both the death and resurrection of the Son of God, two were therefore provided. Now Christ is the sum and substance of these figures and shadows. Surely these solemn transactions must afford to an enlightened Jew a lively type of the imputation of sin to Christ, in order to his being made a sacrifice for it. And thus believing worshippers were led to contemplate the purity of God, the evil of sin, and the necessity of an atonement to expiate guilt, and obtain internal tranquillity and peace with the offended Deity. But these sacrifices could never take away sin as pertaining to the conscience. However they might avert or remove *temporal* judgments, they were not sufficient to secure from the *wrath* to come. But Jesus, who gave himself a sacrifice for sins, *by one offering hath for ever perfected them that were sanctified*. Thus sin having been condemned in his flesh as an infinite evil, he has put it away, and made an end of it as a bar to his people's enjoyment of eternal bliss. Reconciliation for iniquity being completed, the tender, melting language of mercy and loving kindness is heard from the divine throne, instead of the terrific thunder of a sin-avenging God. For thus *said the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts, and in their minds will I write them. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.* Heb. x. 14--18.

The completeness of Christ's atonement is the reason assigned why there needeth no repetition of his sufferings. Else the apostle seems to suppose, that such was his unbounded love to his people and the government of God, that had it been needful he would have suffered repeatedly to have vindicated that and saved them. Nay, his own engagements would have required that he should have been sacrificed frequently, had his sufferings been defective in efficacy. For then, it is observed, *must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* Heb. ix. 25, 26. In the sacrifices of the legal dispensation, *there was, saith the apostle, a remembrance again made of sins every year, because it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats, should take away sins: and therefore every priest which stood daily ministering before God, offered oftentimes the same sacrifices, which could never take away sins: but with what pleasure does the inspired writer dwell upon the glorious contrast! Christ, says he, was once offered to bear the sins of many—once in the end of the world, &c.—once for all—he offered one sacrifice for sins—by one offering, &c.* See Heb. ix. and x. chapters, wherein this important subject is treated of at large.

If the evil of sin, the holiness of God, and the equity of his law and government were duly considered, and deeply impressed on the hearts of men, surely they would not take pleasure in depreciating the *person of Christ*, but would gladly embrace him as the great high-priest over the house of God, infinitely superior to every predecessor in that office. For *neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once unto the holy place, having obtained ETERNAL REDEMPTION for us.* Heb. ix. 12. *Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.* It was therefore NECESSARY that the patterns, or representations of things in the heavens should be purified with these, (19.) *but the heavenly things themselves with BETTER sacrifices than these.* Heb. ix. 22, 23. According to the apostle's reasoning, the sacrifice of Christ was as much better than all those which were offered before, even by divine appointment, as *eternal redemption* is superior to *temporal deliverance*. As the former is infinitely greater, that by which it was obtained must be infinitely better.

Some who discard the idea of Christ's *divinity*, profess to retain the doctrine of his *atonement*, supposing the efficacy of his sufferings to have arisen, not from his *personal fitness* and worth, but *barely* from divine appointment. But if so, the blood of bulls and goats *might* have taken away sins, which the scripture declares was *not possible*, for that a better sacrifice was needed to purify heavenly things. But one could not be *more suitable* or *better* than another, if all were alike *fit* and *good*. According to the divine word it appears, that in point of preciousness, excellence and worth, Christ is superior to all other bestowments of God: the gift of his SON is always represented there, as by far the greatest instance of his love to men. Agreeable to this idea of Christ's superlative excellency, is the apostle's inference, Rom. viii. 32. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.* But if Christ be no more than a creature, this conclusion loses all its force. For creature worth, and even creature conception, is far beneath what God confers on those that love him. But, dear brethren, the value and efficacy of our Lord's sufferings is proportionate to the excellence of his person. By the death of the Son of God, the eternal salvation of his people is secured, and the nature of the great Jehovah illustriously displayed. The sufferings and death of our divine redeemer shew that it is indeed *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, and that sin and suffering are inseparably connected. Herein has God given a greater proof of the holiness of his nature, his love to equity, order and good government, and his infinite abhorrence of sin, than in all the judgments executed on transgressors, in this world or that to come. What are all the sorrows on earth, or sighs in hell, when compared with the agonies and groans of our adorable Immanuel! His ability to bear the curse due to your sins, and feel the displeasure of offended Deity, without sustaining the loss of perpetual happiness, farther illustrates and proves his superiority to all created existences. The curse of the Almighty, executed on the most exalted creatures who excel in strength, would necessarily destroy or annihilate their felicity. The awful gloom, which is the natural effect of a total separation from the origin of bliss, would for ever exclude every ray of hope, and fill their minds with doleful misery: because the *finite* capacity of a mere creature, bears no proportion to *infinite* displeasure, the whole of which could not be

endured in any given period; therefore the spirit would fail before him, and the soul that he hath made be overwhelmed, and sink for ever as in a bottomless pit, under the load of guilt and tremendous horror. Hence the awful misery of them that perish is described by language the most terrific, as *everlasting burning, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, wrath to come, fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries, &c.*

Dear brethren, how ought our hearts to glow with gratitude, to, and for, such a saviour, who was able clearly to discern the nature and number of his people's sins imputed to him, and their awful consequences coming upon him, without despair; and could bear the wrath of God without destruction. For though he died a victim to divine justice, which we had offended, having made reconciliation, removed the curse and procured the blessing for us; having vindicated divine authority, and subdued every enemy; he then ascended triumphantly to heaven, where he appears and acts for his chosen, in every capacity adapted to their wants, and expressive of his love. There he reigns with infinite authority, and shines with unrivalled splendor, beheld, admired and adored by holy spirits of every rank and order. These surround his glorious throne, singing with rapturous ardour, *Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Before him are poured forth the prayers of the saints as from golden vials full of odours, while those who were redeemed from among men, recollecting what they were, and whence they came, have a song peculiar to themselves, which angels cannot sing, in which they say, *Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, &c.* Rev. v. 8. to the end.

To conclude, let us exhort you, dear brethren, to reflect frequently on your unspeakable obligations to God for the gift of his Son. He is not only given to you as the chief good, but was given for you as the only acceptable sacrifice, suited to obtain and secure an honourable and durable peace between God and your souls. Now a way is opened for you to come even to his seat with holy boldness. His language is, *Fury is not in me, I am well pleased for his righteousness sake, and pacified towards you for all that you have done.* May you, dear brethren, habitually live under an humbling sense of the evil nature of sin, which could not have been expiated but in consequence of a sacrifice infinite in value. Oh that you may growingly admire the wisdom, power, purity and grace of your injured sovereign, discovered in the method of salvation through Jesus Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, and express image of his person.

See that you honour the Son even as you honour the Father. This is Jehovah's express command both to angels and men: and it is a reasonable service, founded upon an equality of nature. This was the practice of old Testament saints. To them he frequently appeared as the angel or messenger of the covenant, and was acknowledged and adored as the true God. Indeed he himself, under these appearances repeatedly asserted his real divinity, saying, *I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham, &c.*—God the Father never appeared in any form, nor is he ever called an angel or messenger. But the Son of God, prior to his incarnation, often appeared as a man, an angel or messenger, and yet in this form was revered and worshipped as the God of Israel. Had the object of divine worship
never

never appeared in a creature-form, was it likely, or even possible for the apostle John to have mistaken the object of adoration, and have fallen down before the feet of a created angel, with a design to have worshipped him as the true God? And is it not quite unaccountable that the humble Jesus, if he be no more than a man, should receive and approve of divine homage due only to the great Eternal; and never once say as the holy angel did, *See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant, worship God.* Rev. xix. 10. and xxii. 9.—But we know it was the practice of saints in the apostolic age, may it ever continue to be your's, brethren, *in every place to call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.* 1 Cor. i. 2. Look to him, beloved, as the Lord your righteousness, and rely upon his efficacious blood for pardon, peace, and purity of conscience: and ever remember *you are not your own*, you are bought by him, and profess to be devoted to him. Consider, one great end of all his sufferings was to purchase and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, that they might shew forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.—*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

Signed on behalf of the association,

JOHN GILL, Moderator.

B R E V I A T E S.

The ministers and messengers met in the place of worship soon after six o'clock on Tuesday evening. Brother Gill was chosen moderator. Brother Fuller began in prayer. The letters from the churches were then read, and minutes taken of their contents. Brother Thomas Edmonds concluded the opportunity in prayer.

Met for prayer at six o'clock on Wednesday morning—brethren Cary, Craps, Burton, Ayre, Heighton, and Sharman, engaged.—At ten o'clock the public worship of the day began—brother John Edmonds began in prayer—brother Hopper gave a short account of the nature and design of the association, and prayed—Brother Sutcliff preached from Psalm li. 3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me*—brother Fawcner prayed—brother Ryland, jun. preached from John iii. 30. *He must increase*—brother Morris concluded in prayer.—Public worship began again at six o'clock—brother Greenwood prayed—brother Hall, jun. preached from Mark viii. 36, 37. *For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*—brother West concluded in prayer.

Thursday morning met at six o'clock—brother Payne prayed—some time was spent in relating our experiences as christians and as ministers during the last year—adjourned—and returned again at half past nine—settled the business of the association—fund—read the circular letter, which had this year been drawn up and sent by brother Hall, sen.

N. B. Our dear friend Mr. Hall, sen. was this year absent on account of affliction. We hope all that know him will not forget to pray for the prolonging of his years, and usefulness in the churches.—The moderator closed the association with prayer.

State

State of the churches since the last association.

Added	{	Upon a profession of faith	—	—	116
		By letters of recommendation	—	—	12
		Restored after exclusion	—	—	3
					<hr/> 131
Diminished	{	By death	—	—	27
		By exclusion	—	—	12
		By dismission to other churches	—	—	10
					<hr/> 49
Increase					<hr/> 82

Resolved to continue the monthly prayer-meetings.

The next association to be held at Spalding, in Whitfun-week. Brethren Fawkner and Fuller to preach—in case of failure, brother Hall, sen.

☞ Put up at the George Inn.

A New Edition of the *Selection of Hymns*, published by the Rev. Mr. Rippon, as an *Appendix* to Dr. Watts's Psalms and Hymns, is now printed, Price 2s. 6d. 3s. or 3s. 6d.—Apply to Mr. Rippon or Mr. Ryland.

Shortly will be re-published, *An humble Attempt to promote explicit Agreement and visible Union of God's People in extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion, &c.* written by that eminent Servant of God, the late President EDWARDS, of New-England; and first printed in 1747, but never yet published in Europe. The Price will be 9d. sewed.—Apply to Brother Sutcliff, of Olney.

N.B. Two Vols. of posthumous Sermons by this excellent Man, are now in the Press in Scotland, copied from his Manuscripts by his Son the present Dr. Edwards, of Newhaven, in Connecticut.

Lately was published, *The Law not against the Promises of God*; a Sermon delivered at the annual Association of the Baptist Ministers and Churches, assembled at Leicester, May 30, 1787. By John Ryland, junior. Published at the Request of the Ministers and others.—Sold by Buckland, Paternoster-Row, London. Price 6d.

Also, *Two Discourses*, delivered by A. Fuller and J. Ryland, at the Settlement of the Rev. Mr. Robert Fawkner, in the Pastoral Office over the Baptist Church at Thorn, in Bedfordshire.—Sold also by Buckland. Price 6d.

Where may be had,

Mr. Fuller's Treatise, entitled, *The Gospel of Christ worthy of all Acceptation*:—And his Defence of the same, in Reply to Mr. Button and Mr. Dan Taylor. Price 1s. 6d. each.

